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UNCLAS VIENNA 003060

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN VIEWS ON THE AVIAN INFLUENZA THREAT

REF: STATE 153802

1. (U) DCM delivered reftel points to Clemens Auer, the Minister of Health's Chief of Staff, on September 8. APHIS also discussed avian flu issues with Johann Herzog, Ministry of Health Advisor for Veterinary Affairs, Medicine, Biotechnology, and Food Safety; and with Johan Damoser, Austria's Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO). Auer said that on September 6, the GoA's Council of Ministers had approved a National Plan to address the threat of avian flu and a human pandemic. Auer told us the GoA used differentiated strategies towards the H5N1 avian flu and any new strain that could become infectious between humans. Austria's National Plan, which Auer passed to us, includes plans to address the threat to agriculture, as well as plans to deal with an influenza pandemic.

Response to H5N1 Avian Influenza

2. (U) Auer pointed out that the GoA has been taking precautionary measures to monitor bird breeding grounds and migratory routes for several years. Herzog told us that the GoA had instituted heightened surveillance of birds since the outbreak in Russia, checking "hundreds of wild birds and thousands of domestic birds." Veterinary officials have not ordered farms to place free-range poultry indoors. Austria does not lie on major migratory routes from the Trans-Urals. The last case of avian flu in Austria was in 1953. In the event of infected birds, the National Plan envisages increased surveillance, establishment of national and regional crisis centers, closure of farms, quarantining entire regions, and vaccination of poultry.

Austrian Strategy Against an Influenza Pandemic

3. (U) The National Plan recognizes the potential for the virus to mutate into a strain that is infectious between humans. Measures to deal with a pandemic include the following: a detailed elaboration of responsibilities for health care and law enforcement officials; a surveillance program; and the legal framework for these measures.

4. (SBU) Auer told us that Austria was unsuccessfully attempting to order a sufficient stockpile -- for 20% of Austria's population of 8 million -- of the anti-viral drug Tamiflu from Roche Austria. Auer complained that Roche was

insisting that it did not have enough Tamiflu to fill the government's order and was charging the MoH Euro 27 for a pack of 10 tablets. Auer added that he would work within EU structures to try to persuade Roche to be more cooperative. According to press reports, the states of Lower Austria, Burgenland, and Vienna have already stockpiled Tamiflu for "front-line workers."

15. (U) According to Auer, preparing for a possible avian pandemic required a proper mix between anti-viral drugs and vaccines. Baxter Austria notified the MoH that, thanks to a technological improvement, it would be able to produce an effective vaccine against a mutated avian flu strain within six weeks after the virus emerged. Auer contrasted this with the normal 3-4 month gap between an outbreak and the production of a vaccine.

Brown